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ABSTRACT

Young learners need a quality program for developing reading skills which is both sequential and holistic--sequential because there is an appropriate order to some skills, holistic because skills need to be incorporated in context. Word recognition techniques are thus integrated with ideas gleaned from reading. The learner should use acquired subject matter to engage in critical and creative thinking, and not be taught comprehension skills in isolation. In a quality reading readiness program, a sequential and holistic approach can help the learner develop essential reading skills. (RS)

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IMPROVING THE READING CURRICULUM

Marlow Ediger

Reading, the first of the three R's, is a skill which integrates with all academic disciplines and each curriculum area. To achieve well in society, reading skills need thorough development. Being a good reader aids in securing jobs and work in the societal arena. Those who fail to attain needed abilities in reading may well lack success in the world of work.

Enjoying quality experiences in a vicarious manner emphasizes being a proficient reader. Life in its many and diverse dimensions can not be fully appreciated unless reading abilities are functionally developed.

Developing skills in reading is sequential. The young learner when starting in formal schooling generally begins the sequential ordered steps in learning to read and reading to learn. A few pupils have acquired specific reading skills in the preschool years. In either situation, young learners need to experience a sequential, quality program of reading instruction.

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A quality curriculum in reading stresses the concept of providing for individual differences. Each pupil then needs to achieve optimally in reading. A reading readiness program is not

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needed for all kindergarten or first grade pupils. Those who possess selected reading skills upon entering formal programs of education must experience sequence in learning. Also, those pupils who have few or no reading skills in their repertoire upon entering school need to experience appropriate order of activities in learning to read.

A quality reading readiness program needs to emphasize a holistic philosophy. First of all, the teacher needs to select quality library books on the understanding level of early primary grade pupils. These books should be read orally in an appealing manner to pupils in a reading readiness curriculum. Proper voice inflection, stress, pitch, and juncture need to be in evidence when reading orally to pupils. Eye-contact with learners is important in the oral reading act. Illustrations with the library book need to be shown to pupils as they are related to the abstract words read. The contents in the library book emphasize related content, not isolated ideas. Holism on the part of pupils is important in perceiving the relationship of content read by the classroom teacher.

A second reading readiness activity emphasizes the use of language experience approaches. Young learners must experience objects, audio-visual materials, an excursion in school or on the playground, or a listening activity to secure background information. Based on one or more of the above named experiences, a pupil or a committee of learners may present ideas orally for the teacher to record on the chalkboard, or a chart, or on the monitor of a word processor. Young pupils then experience writing in that

talk is perceived in print. The teacher guides pupils to read the content individually or collectively in a group. The teacher points to words and phrases as the oral reading experience progresses. The emphasis is upon integrating the listening, speaking, reading, and writing vocabularies of pupils in the language experience approach in a quality reading readiness program. Isolating these four vocabularies from each other is not warranted. Rather, a philosophy of holism must prevail. The listening, speaking, reading, and writing vocabularies are further integrated with the personal experiences of pupils in providing content for the experience chart. When learners are guided to read the content orally, holistic content must be an end result. Analyzing subject matter in the experience chart in terms of phonics or syllabication instruction is not recommended. Rather, holism emphasizes pupils with teacher guidance read and understand the contents in the entire experience chart.

In a quality reading readiness program, pupils, may engage in auditory discrimination activities. It is salient for pupils, if at all possible, to hear likenesses and differences in sounds. Once learners attach meaning to the concept of rhyme, they can give words which rhyme with those presented by the teacher. Or, young learners can provide words which have the same beginning sounds as those given by the classroom teacher. Pupils presenting words which rhyme or words which have the same beginning sounds like those given by the teacher can emphasize an enjoyable game. Each word given by learners may be printed on the chalkboard and used in a sentence after the game has been completed. The emphasis here is upon holism

with words being a part of complete sentences. Pupils must realize the relatedness of words to sentences and sentences to paragraphs, as sequence is stressed in reading.

Visual discrimination also needs adequate emphasis in a quality reading readiness curriculum. Here, pupils may see three words, two of which are spelled correctly, within one sentence. The three words may be printed vertically as they should come within the sentence. Pupils should always realize that words come in sentences and are not functional in isolation. The word which looks different from the other two words is then crossed out by the pupil. The crossed out word is the incorrectly spelled word.

Labels may also be placed on a few selected items in the classroom. The label, printed in manuscript style only, names the object it is placed on. Each label should appear within a sentence and be underlined. Learning to identify words in isolation is not recommended. Rather, each label contains a word within a contextual situation. Young learners need to be stimulated to identify new words within sentences.

Story telling by the teacher can be an excellent activity in a reading readiness program. A flannel board with cutouts may be used in this activity. A stimulating manner and voice to tell the story may encourage young learners to become better listeners. Stories told need to be sequential and meaningful. Content in the story is holistic and not to be analyzed. Enjoyment and appreciation by the pupils of stories told are major objectives to attain. Story telling activities can contain content of literature which pupils will read later in a more formal program of reading instruction.

Audio-visual materials can provide excellent content in literature for young learners. For example, a filmstrip that contains subject matter of a popular selection in literature for pupils can provide the basis for a discussion among pupils. Learners may become well acquainted with literary characters, setting, and plot in a story. Later on, pupils when ready will wish to read library books pertaining to what was discussed in the class setting. The teacher needs to guide students to understand sequentially each story holistically from an audio-visual presentation.

A Sequential Reading Program

With appropriate sequence, a reading readiness program blends into a more formal program of instruction.

Reading specialists generally emphasize six techniques of word recognition which pupils should achieve. Care must be taken to avoid having pupils feel that each technique is in isolation from the act of reading. The six techniques are utilizing phonics, syllabication, structural analysis, configuration clues, picture clues, and context clues.

When students work and complete sequential pages in a phonics workbook, the following need to be emphasized:

1. Use whole word phonics, not isolated sounds.
2. Stress whole word phonics with complete

sentences.

3. Emphasize phonics as a tool to unlock unknown words. Phonics is not and end in and of itself.
4. Teach phonics sounds as related within a word and within sentences.

Syllabication and structural analysis must:

1. Emphasize units such as syllables and their relationships within a word as being a part of a complete sentence. Units such as prefixes and suffixes should not be taught in isolation. Rather, prefixes, suffixes, and base words must reflect meaning and holism within a complete word being related to larger conclusions such as words and sentences.
2. Receive adequate emphasis but not be over stressed in the reading curriculum. Pupils who read well do not need instruction in syllabication and structural analysis. These learners have demonstrated adequate skills in syllabication and structural analysis due to reading effectively.

Pictures should be utilized in textbooks to build background information within pupils prior to reading abstract words. Thus, the illustration are directly related to the content to be read. An illustration should never be separated from the context in a basal

reader. For young learners, an additional use for pictures within a textbook is to assist in word identification. Here again, the picture and an abstract word or phrase become one and not separate entities.

Context clues and their use to identify unknown words emphasize holism in reading. Within a sentence, pupils choose a word which fits in with the rest of the words in a sentence. The isolation element of individual words is entirely eliminated.

Selected teacher tend to isolate the utilization by pupils of configuration clues in identifying unknown words. When viewing the length, shape and form of any word, the learner must perceive these learnings being related to other words in the sentence, as well as attach meaning to an entire paragraph.

With six word recognition techniques to teach the pupils the reading teacher must:

1. Relate each approach to the concept of holism. Each technique becomes a tool in becoming a more proficient reader. Techniques of word recognition do not become ends in and of themselves. Reading to acquire meaningful content is the major objective.
2. Stress higher levels of cognition. With increased skill in comprehending ideas, learners become critical and creative thinkers, as well as develop skills in problem solving.

3. Assist pupils to achieve quality attitudes toward reading. Reading should not consist of constant drill in word recognition techniques. Rather, the act of reading is to enjoy, to appreciate and to empathize.

Comprehension in the Reading Curriculum

Comprehension skills can be developed by pupils in an isolated manner, just as is true of attaining skills in word recognition.

Reading to follow directions may be taught as an isolated entity. Thus, pupils read and then show comprehension to the reading teacher of acquired content. Rather, directions read by the pupils whould be utilized in a functional situation. In this way, learners reveal comprehension of directions by utilizing or applying what has been learned. The reading of directions then is not separated from the actual, related sequential concept of doing received from the abstract words.

Reading to acquire facts can certainly emphasize isolated knowledge. Facts, however, should be perceived by learners as supporting a generalization. The generalization is supported by facts. Facts are utilized to develop broader ideas, such as generalizations.

Reading to skim or scan for isolated bits of information in and of itself has little or no value. Rather, the learner skims or scans for a purpose or reason. The skimming or scanning is done to locate small items of knowledge to develop a chart, a bulletin board display, or other useful product. The bits of information are not entities unto themselves, but are instrumental to completing a sequential task or product.

Reading critically and creatively as well as reading to solve problems emphasizes holism. Thus, with ideas gleaned from reading, pupils are to think critically, creatively, and to solve problems.

In Conclusion

A holistic curriculum integrates word recognition techniques with ideas gleaned from reading. Diverse kinds of comprehension skills should not be taught in isolation. Rather, whatever the kind of comprehension skill being emphasized in reading, the learner utilizes the acquired subject matter to engage in critical and creative thinking, as well as to solve problems. Reading is a utilitarian skill in school, as well as in society. Reading also stresses enjoyment of content to enrich personal lives and its many rich facets and experiences.